

**Daily Union Article**  
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**Title: "The Teen Years"**

Parenting during the teenage years of your child's life is often accompanied with increased levels of stress and conflict. Even though these are normal conditions that accompany this period in their life cycle, it still requires a lot of energy and patience to handle.

Teenagers are going through a significant amount of change in a relatively short period of time. As they age, they are experiencing dramatic physical, emotional, social, and cognitive changes. If you ask an emotional teenager what the problem is, they may or may not be able to give you a reasonable answer. Many will just throw up their hands and yell "I don't know" as they storm out of the room!

The developmental changes teens experience are much more random than the changes they experienced in early childhood. There is no "right" time for changes to occur and there is not set duration for changes to happen. Girls begin changing physically on the inside as young as 7 years of age while boys begin changing on the inside as early as 9 years of age. Some boys may experience their first growth spurt as early as 11 years old and may continue growing until they are 21!

As a parent, you see the changes in their height and weight which may lead you to think that their emotional maturity is keeping pace, but that simply is not the case. Teenager's physical changes begin well before emotional maturity becomes more defined. This can cause confusion for teens. They know their body has made changes- they are wearing adult clothing, using adult hygiene products or even have the responsibility of a job. However, that doesn't mean they are as emotionally mature as they appear. Just because they *look* like adults, they have yet to develop into cognitively, emotionally, and socially mature individuals. Those changes are still in progress as a slower rate.

The hormonal changes their body experiences during early adolescence can make a child act or feel "out of control." This creates emotional turmoil that leads to an increase in frequency of conflict. When teens physically grow so quickly, they get more tired and more "touchy". Teens often struggle to get enough sleep or to eat balanced meals which also contribute to their more "sensitive" nature. Tired and hungry teens are a recipe for disaster!

What can a parent do to help make the teen years a more positive experience for themselves and their children? Iowa State Research and Extension has developed a video to help parents of teenagers learn about 10 principles for parenting a teen: "Parenting Your Teen." Each of these principles are summarized here:

- 1) **Remember, parents matter.** Make a difference in your teenager's life by providing guidance and support. Even though you may feel they are trying to push you away and keep you "out of their business," being involved in their life is as important as ever. When your teen acts like they don't want you around, your child still really does need you and needs to know you care.
- 2) **Stay warm and close.** It's impossible to love a child too much – even a teen! Spoil your teen with love and support every day. Spend time with them and remember to tell them you love them.
- 3) **Stay involved with your teen's life.** Ask questions about school, friends, and activities. Go to their band concerts, athletic events, and other extracurricular activities. They need to know you are interested in them just as much now as you were when they were young.
- 4) **Set limits and provide structure.** Clearly communicate your expectations to your teen. As your teen matures, adapt those rules and expectations to their age but don't get sloppy. Children of ALL ages need clear expectations and rules to guide their decisions and behaviors.
- 5) **Enforce rules and consequences.** Be up front with your teens about what the consequences are for breaking rules before they get in trouble. Just as you need to be clear with the rules, you need to be equally clear with what the consequences will be should they make inappropriate choices.
- 6) **Be consistent.** Parents should discuss and agree on basic parenting principles for guiding their children. Follow that up with being consistent in how you respond each day and in every situation. You will send mixed messages when you are inconsistent and teens will become even more challenging as their frustration increases.
- 7) **Explain yourself and engage your teen in communicating.** Teens want to know why a rule or consequence exists. Banish the phrase "Because I told you so" from your communication and give your teen a voice in determining consequences, should they choose to break the rules.
- 8) **Don't use harsh discipline.** Harsh discipline, like yelling and slapping, has no proven long-term effectiveness. If you are angry, tell your teen you will talk about a hot topic later and give yourself time to collect your thoughts and contain your emotions.
- 9) **Treat your teen with respect.** Face it, your teenager is growing up. They need to explore independence in a safe and responsible way, but that means you have to give them some latitude to do so.
- 10) **Understand adolescence is a time of change.** Remember that their body changes first, but the rest of their developmental changes need time to catch up with their body.

Parenting teenagers may be a challenge, but it also offers parents the opportunity to help put the defining touches to years of effort in preparing children for life in an

adult body and adult world. Take time to enjoy this exciting part of your teen's life.  
Until next time, keep living resourcefully!